

'Slabs' trade controlled by two firms

By Roger Boye

Here are answers to more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—A local dealer is selling a large selection of "MS-65 slabbed coins." What does the term mean? **R. Y., Chicago**

A—"MS-65" denotes rarities in choice uncirculated (or "mint state") condition. Among other things, such coins must show no trace of wear, with few minute scratches called "bag marks."

"Slabbed" refers to coins that have been graded professionally, usually by the Professional Coin Grading Service of Newport Beach, Calif., or the Numismatic Guaranty Corporation of America of Parsippany, N.J.

Those two companies place the coins they have studied in airtight, hard-plastic holders, which dealers dub "slabs"; each holder includes information about the coin's estimated condition category (or "grade").

Slabbed rarities often command a special premium on the hobby market, thanks to their popularity with investors.

Q—We may invest \$5,000 in gold American Eagles. Do you recommend that we keep the coins or have the dealer store them for us? **N. B., Niles**

A—If it were my money, I'd take possession and lock the gold in a safe-deposit box. That way I'd be certain the coins exist and that they're properly preserved.